

esty a month back, Barnes. What do you think about him now?"

"Farrell? I don't think about him any more, sir. I know it was him. The losses of everything stopped the day he went."

"Hm! Where did he go, Barnes?"

"J. K. Lowry Company have him, sir."

"You recommended him to them?"

"Certainly, sir; didn't you say so?"

"Yes," Corlett admitted. "But now I want you to— No; that's all, Barnes; I'll attend to it myself."

And when Barnes was gone the general manager called the Lowry Company. When he located the proper official:

"This is about a salesman named Farrell whom our retail department recommended to you last month. How's he doing?"

"Oh, all right! Fine! We've put him to selling crockery and things of that sort, so he wouldn't be under the temptation he was at your place—"

"Temptation?" Corlett repeated. "What do you mean? How did you know we had trouble with him over here?"

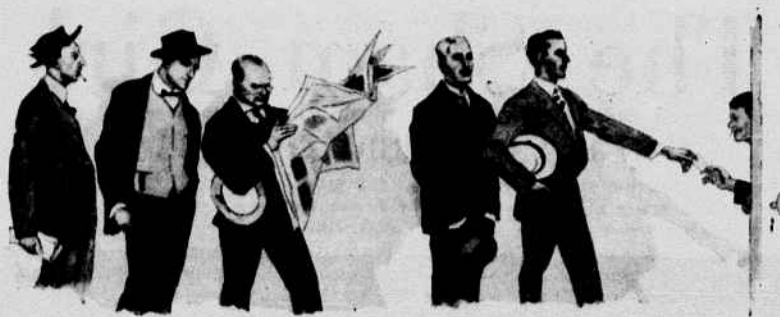
The man at the other end of the wire laughed.

"Oh, we've a system to find out little things like that, Mr. Corlett. The head of your retail department tried to lie like an employer and a gentleman for the fellow; but we have a way of finding out pretty much what the real situation is. . . . What? . . . Yes, sir. Of course; I'll be glad to send some one over or come over myself to explain our method. . . . All right; right away."

RECENTLY I wrote for the readers of this magazine a brief explanation, under the title of "Selecting Salesmen by Science," of one of the tests now being used by many large and progressive companies for determining the native ability of applicants for positions as salesmen. While such tests as that which was published have proved of great value in marking natural capacity in men who have had experience, as well as in indicating the most able prospects in a group of green applicants, the tests are not intended to supplant other methods of examining applicants; they are planned to supplement other methods.

There are always in the world more people who are employed, or who have been employed, than there are people applying for the first time for a position. The proper ascertaining and the proper estimating of "previous records" is, therefore, one of the most important things to every employer; and it is one of the features of the employment problem which is admittedly in the most unsatisfactory shape. The tests previously discussed come to the aid of the employer only in demonstrating for him, within reasonable limits, the grade of natural ability in an employee or in a prospective employee; they can not demonstrate the grade of the honesty or reliability of an applicant, or uncover other kinks in his character, which, entirely irrespective of his natural ability, may make him a good or bad employee. The previous record of the applicant, in other employment or at school or elsewhere, is—or should be—of the greatest aid here.

But the trouble is that, with few exceptions, each employer finds it practically impossible for him to secure trustworthy and usable information from previous employers of a person coming to him for a position; and, with very few exceptions, the employer who complains about the effect upon his business of this bad condition himself only aggravates it for others. This not only works injury to the employers, but also does injustice to the great majority of employees who are honest, reliable, and thoroughly industrious. It is a wrong to everybody when—as under our present loose practice—a man or a woman who has made an excellent record for industry and character under one employer, can carry to the next employer no better recommendation than the person who has been dismissed "for cause," and yet who is commonly recommended, either out of the customary soft-headed soft-heartedness, or from dread of causing "trouble," if the truth is told.



"The new tests have put an end to hiring an applicant on the usual general terms. It has reduced a 'recommendation' to something definite and reliable."

With a view of insuring more trustworthy and usable information, Dr. Walter D. Scott—the psychologist whose investigations in practical business problems have resulted in several recognizedly important works, and who devised the test for natural ability previously published, describes a form blank for the "previous record" which is being used along with the tests. As the tests have succeeded in supplanting the old method of employing on a general impression of the applicant's ability, so this new form has proved highly effective. It has put an end to employing a person recommended only in the usual general—and therefore utterly meaningless and untrustworthy—terms. It has reduced a "recommendation" to something definite and reliable.

This is the form for salesmen which the Lowry Company sent to Corlett (the names of the companies are, of course, fictitious).

.....1917
Dear Sir:

Mr. of has applied to us for a position as salesman and given you as reference. He states that he was employed by you as for a period

Will you please advise whether this information is correct?

Why did the applicant leave your employment?

Please place a check mark in the space below that indicates the character of his service:

	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Work	()	()	()
Conduct	()	()	()
Ability	()	()	()
Character	()	()	()

Would you be willing to reemploy him?

Would you recommend him for the position applied for?

Out of ten men filling the position which the applicant held with you, what would be his comparative rank?

(If he would be the best, please mark his rank 1; this estimate is, of course, only an approximation; but we will greatly appreciate your best judgment in the matter.)

Sincerely yours,

The first two questions on this blank are, of course, only the usual ones which are now in use and which are customarily answered in the meaningless terms; the other questions allow no such laxity, and, whether they are all answered or not, elicit information of definite significance. The skipping of a question may be quite as significant as an answer.

Under present conditions, it is seldom to be expected that a previous employer will mark the "unsatisfactory" column after conduct or character unless the applicant has been proved guilty of open or flagrant offense; a mark of unsatisfactory after either of these two, therefore, is of serious significance. A mark of

"fair" warns of caution. Ordinarily the column "good" will be marked, as regards conduct and particularly as regards character, whenever possible. After work and ability a mark of "unsatisfactory" is less seriously significant. One will more readily indicate in writing an honest opinion of another's work or ability than of his character. Therefore a mark of "fair" on the first and third lines of that section need not be discounted.

When a previous employer marks work "good" and omits to mark conduct or character at all, nothing but an unfavorable opinion is to be deduced. Avoidance of the question, "Would you be willing to reemploy him?" also may be set down as a "no,"—if everything else is answered,—or, at best, as a matter of doubt. A positive answer to the next question is not as significant as an affirmative to the previous one. Many people will quite willingly recommend to another a person whom they would not reemploy.

The last question—because its form encourages an unusually fair and frank answer—is one of the most important.

An employer, who may vaguely feel that he exposes himself to action for damages if he goes on record as describing another person's character or conduct unfavorably, can answer the last question fairly without a qualm. To say that a discharged employee has an unsatisfactory character may be challengeable; but to say that, in your opinion, he is tenth among ten men in your employ tells a good deal and can not be combated. A man like Barnes, though eager to avoid trouble for himself and to get Farrell off his hands, finds himself bound to tell at least part of the truth in answering that last question, if only in fairness to the other men working under him.

Dr. Scott indicates the grading of the blanks upon a percentage basis. The blank should be filled out by the last three employers, if the applicant has had that many. If all the previous employers fill in all the blanks under "good" and put a (1) in the last paragraph, Scott gives 100 per cent. on previous record. Corresponding percentages are given for all the various combinations found in the blank.

In such a customary case as described at the beginning of this article, Barnes would be expected to "lie like an employer and a gentleman" in his general answer to the question as to why Farrell left his last employment; he would mark Farrell's work good; his conduct, good; ability, good; and avoid marking character.

Barnes would dodge going on record as willing to reemploy Farrell, but would cheerfully recommend him, per custom; however, he would rank him down near the bottom of ten men in his employ. From all this the Lowry Company would perceive that Farrell was a good salesman who conducted himself properly, but that there was something to watch out for; which would lead to ascertaining the truth and the placing of Farrell in a job where he would be removed from the temptation to which previously he was exposed, and where he would get a grip upon himself and make good; while Inglis, having lost in stocks four thousand dol-

lars of his employers' money, was making for Canada.

Adoption of such a system for insuring trustworthy information as to previous record will put a quick end to the pernicious practice to-day under which an employee who gives seriously unsatisfactory service can count upon the weakness of his employer to give him a good recommendation and send him, without having suffered for his derelictions, to victimize another employer. Establishment of such a system will insure to the great majority of worthy workers the reward of an honest record of achievement which can not be counterfeited for the slack or dishonest man, and which therefore will encourage a good man to maintain his standing.

The record form which is here discussed is one designed primarily for ascertaining and grading the records of salesmen; but the principles of it apply to the record of any sort of employee, and may well be extended into the field of domestic service, where the "reference" has become so abused as to be almost completely worthless.

I have described, previously, something of Dr. Scott's method of standardizing the grade of native intellectual ability to be required of applicants for positions as salesmen. Standards of physical condition to be required of applicants for positions are so generally understood that they require no particular definition here. Determining the grade of the technical ability to be required of an applicant for a selling position is a problem now being solved. Dr. Scott has attacked it most successfully in a manner described on one of his "Instruction to Applicants" blanks.

In Room A is a merchant who is to be regarded as a "buyer." You are to enter Room A, introduce yourself to Merchant A, and try to sell him some kind of merchandise. You will spend five minutes with Mr. A, then pass on to Room B and repeat your selling talk to Merchant B. You will keep this up till you have called on all the "buyers."

You may sell any line of merchandise. The following are examples: automobiles, breakfast food, clothing, fountain-pens, life insurance, office supplies, real estate, rubber goods, sporting goods, tobacco, typewriters, etc.

You may make the same talk to each "buyer." If you decide to sell an automobile, then you may assume that each of the merchants is an automobile dealer. If you decide to sell a breakfast food, then assume that each "buyer" is a grocer, etc.

Present your merchandise for five minutes in such a way that the "buyer" will actually want to purchase your line. Sell as you would if the "buyer" were a real prospective.

Prepare your line of talk in advance!

The personality of each applicant similarly is passed upon by several interviewers, who judge upon personal appearance, tact, industry, promise of usefulness to the company, etc. Personality, of course, is particularly hard to reduce to "quantitative determinations"; but, whatever the qualities that are judged, the examiners must summarize their judgment in a single figure.

"Some of these quantitative determinations," Scott says, "are, of course, more important than others; but all must be combined into a single figure according to their relative importance" in respect to the place to be filled. Previous record, physical condition, native intellectual ability, technical ability, personality!

How few firms make the slightest attempt to determine how applicants make for positions grade in the qualities that make for success or failure; how few could even define those qualities, much less define any real standard in respect to each that must be reached by a successful applicant. Dr. Scott's work, if not revolutionary, certainly is most dynamically evolutionary. It is in recognition of this that thirty of the most successful firms in the country are working together, and with him, as "cooperating members" of the Bureau of Salesmanship Research, and that hundreds of the most progressive men at the head of sales organizations are following his work with the most eager interest.

Of this work, as it continues to develop results which can be expressed in tried and tested terms, more will be written.

THIS is the second of Mr. Balmer's articles presenting the results of Professor Scott's work in applying scientific methods to the problems of selecting, hiring, and handling men in business. The first article was called "Selecting Salesmen by Science." A third article in the series will appear shortly.